

**A PRACTICAL PROGRAM  
FOR  
REPLANNING THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**THE PROBLEM**

**THE METHOD**

**THE MEANS**

**THE CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK**

**574 Fifth Avenue, New York City**

**December 20, 1955**

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## A NOTE OF APPRECIATION

In presenting this report, the Trustees of the City Club of New York wish to thank especially I. D. Robbins for the many months of diligent research and creative effort that went into the preparation and writing of this report; Ray-

mond J. Horowitz who worked on the legal aspects; Lewis Davis, who prepared the maps of proposed areas; Albert S. Bard and Charles Garrett whose editing was invaluable.

WALTER M. WEIS, *Chairman*

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK

The City Club of New York invites the attention of all devoted New Yorkers to the work it is doing and suggests that if any reader feels he belongs in the company of men dedicated to the

welfare of our great City, he should write to the secretary of the Club. All inquiries will be submitted at once to the membership committee, which will arrange the necessary interviews.

## **A KEY TO THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT**

This report spells out specific methods for achieving quick and dramatic improvements in environmental conditions in New York City. To do this, it contains especially the following:

1. An analysis of major environmental problems with suggestions as to the specific decisions which the City must make with respect to them. (pages 5 to 10 inclusive)

2. A proposal for financing and administering the large-scale reconstruction of depressed areas of New York, at the same time providing solutions to parking, traffic and other problems

arising from high density. To illustrate the method, the Club has selected a 150-acre area in downtown Manhattan comprising the present produce area and suggests how the redevelopment of such an area could be accomplished and tied in with city planning as a whole. (pages 10 to 15 inclusive)

3. A proposal for reorganization of the City Planning Commission, with lines of responsibility running directly to the Mayor of the City. (pages 15 and 16)

## **A PRACTICAL PROGRAM FOR REPLANNING THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

### **Introduction**

The idea of replanning the City of New York naturally stimulates the imagination of anyone who identifies himself with the great city. Among members of the City Club are many men with direct interests in city planning problems. These include architects, engineers, builders, realtors and lawyers with many years of practical experience in handling legal and administrative problems for the City. However, it was clear, from more than a year of effort by the Sub-Committee on City Planning, that replanning the City requires more than technical skill, more than financial and administrative know-how. Above all, it requires a creative feeling for the subject and a willingness to brush aside traditional approaches. Every member who worked on the committee concluded that the present framework for planning and the methods of carrying it out are inadequate. To meet our critical planning problems, we must be prepared to break new ground in our thinking as well as in actual construction.

The City Club is frankly dissatisfied with the concept of city planning as it has been applied in New York. It feels that New York City has lost sight of the central idea of planning—that there is a way to program the sound develop-

ment of a city, providing adequately for industry and commerce, housing, education, recreation, transportation and traffic, culture and aesthetics. It feels that planning in New York has been underused and undervalued, that it has broken down into little more than a combination of spot zoning plus a competition of interests to obtain “projects” out of the capital budget or other sources of funds.

The City Club feels that planning has been sold short as a way to solve the City’s problems. While many projects have had a popular appeal, there is no well-rounded, consistent program of improvement. The people are impressed with real-estate showmanship, but they find that most grandiose schemes for super buildings do not go to the heart of making New York a better place to live.

The City Club believes that nothing would so arouse the civic spirit of New Yorkers, as the belief that New York has a big and sound plan and is acting on it. We cannot expect the millions of New Yorkers each to know what has to be done to make New York a better place to live and work. They must look to their leaders to give them the picture. Once the ultimate objectives and the scale of the effort required for a



better and richer municipal home are understood, every step-by-step change and improvement will be appreciated and supported.

This report is an effort by the City Club of New York to state for the benefit of the entire

community what it means by city planning for New York, to establish a series of planning objectives and to suggest the principal means by which these objectives can be reached.

### The Proper Objectives of a City Plan

A well-planned, large city can have many advantages over other types of communities, both for working and living. Clearly, New York provides a variety and quality of services and talents which encourage industry to locate its executive offices here. But also, New York has a richness of cultural opportunity, a vigorous enterprise, a liberal and tolerant spirit which must be sustained. We must seek to eliminate the frustrations which lead men to accept two hours or more of daily commuting. We must provide the amenities which will keep people in a sympathetic frame of mind to appreciate the great things that our World City has and may have to offer.

What are some of the things we should try to provide?

1. A decent house in a decent neighborhood for everyone.
2. An efficient transportation, highway, street and parking system.
3. Good schools, adequate in capacity and facilities to the population they are to serve.
4. Adequate recreational facilities.
5. An attractive environment.

Sound city planning also involves such matters as public health services, including hospitals and proper sewage disposal. These the people have the right to expect from their City along with adequate police and fire protection, street maintenance and similar services. By and large, however, the criticisms of our city, which planning must try to overcome, are those which arise from the *pressures of overcrowding* and the inefficiency of its physical plan.

Up to now, all of the planning and planned construction that have been done are insignificant compared to the normal, regular operation of the real estate market, which goes on largely

undisturbed, seeking the most profitable use of land, irrespective of the effect on the City or the ultimate effect on other real estate values.

But no efforts based on patching up the present mess could possibly catch up with the growing problem and no "planning" by independent agencies, such as the Port Authority, separately financed and concerned with their own revenues, can possibly give adequate consideration to the problem as a whole. And unless there is a plan for the continued improvement of educational, cultural and recreational facilities, as well as housing and transportation, these needs will be subject to fluctuating or parochial interest and suffer from neglect.

A great weakness of planning in New York has been the feebleness of leadership. Practical politics has scoffed at the concept of planning written into the Charter and called it "ivory tower." Our political leaders have sought only short-term gains. They have had no vision of the glory of a replanned city inspiring them to inspire the people. Even when men of vision have been appointed to the City Planning Commission, they have been forced to handle so many petty details of administration and quasi-judicial duties as to leave them little time for creative thought on planning problems. And worst of all, our political leaders have starved the City Planning Department and Commission, providing a staff absurdly small for the task assigned.

It is not too late to correct this situation or to move into new concepts of planning. We are apparently entering upon a period of enormous industrial and scientific progress, assuring higher incomes and a demand for a higher standard of living.

There are those who see the growing suburb

as the knell of the big city. Shall we throw over all that has been accomplished in the building of New York, the greatest monument to the American economy, the symbol of enterprise and opportunity? Shall we say that we cannot make New York a better place in which to live or that it should be accepted as a place only for the rich who can afford it and the poor who can't help themselves? Should we acknowledge that we are up against insurmountable financial, legal and administrative obstacles, that New York is not a city, that it is a region, that we cannot plan for New York, that we must plan for 22 counties, over most of which we have no control and which only slowly, grudgingly, jealously, and competitively are willing to admit some dependence on the city of which they are really only satellites? Or should we boldly plan, to the extent to which we are able, within our financial means and within our lifetimes, to solve in New York the problems which can and must be solved here?

To the City Club of New York the answers seem clear. We must do what we can. We believe that before too many years there will be diminishing returns from suburban living. Longer commuting time, crowded highways, urbanization of the suburbs, higher suburban taxes, will reopen many eyes to the values of New York

City life, provided we of New York make our city attractive enough. But, even if we cannot plan for the urban fringe and cannot lure back those who have left, we have an obligation to ourselves and to our neighbors to make New York the best possible place to work as well as live. We believe, in fact, that those who elect to live in the suburbs, but work here, identify themselves so closely with the city that they are prepared to accept a full share of responsibility for the planning of the city.

To make New York a better place to live and work, we must readjust our planning sights. Almost every planning concept for handling traffic, for clearing slums, both industrial and commercial, for building highways, that has ever been contemplated within the City of New York, has been on too small a scale. Considering the high capital cost and the monumental nature of many of our improvements, it is sad to find them obsolete almost before they draw their first breaths of life. The key word is scale. Planning, and the administration and financing to support it, must be scaled up to the actual needs of the City of New York and speeded up to achieve results quickly.

IRVING D. ROBBINS, *Chairman*  
City Planning Subcommittee

## SEVEN BASIC PLANNING DECISIONS

It is necessary to make certain decisions as a preliminary to offering a planning program for the City of New York. Following is some of the Club's thinking on the underlying problems:

### 1. *The Automobile.*

Can the use of automobiles be restricted? Can provision be made for off-street parking so that the city can be relieved of its dyskinesia? Can people be forced to travel to and around New York without autos? Is there any way goods can be moved within the city without trucks?

Even though the bridge-and-road-building plans of the Port of New York Authority and the Tri-Borough Bridge and Tunnel Authority

will merely lay additional problem children on the doorstep of the City, such programs are popular with the people and their almost assured overuse is the best evidence of their need.

The cult of the auto is firmly established. Our biggest industries are related directly to the automobile. There is no foreseeable possibility that people will be willing to give up the ownership and use of automobiles if they can afford them. If people cannot use their automobiles in New York, they will move out of New York so that they can use them.

The City Club Committee on Planning is forced to conclude from all data available that there is substantially no limit to the number of



automobiles the people will own, nor to the inconvenience they are willing to submit to in order to own, and even occasionally use, them. Planning must therefore be done with the growing use of automobiles and trucks in mind.

## 2. *Housing.*

A major reason why people move out of New York is that it is impossible for new shelter to be built in New York by private enterprise without public assistance at rentals which most of the people can afford to pay. It is fair to say that no family earning less than \$6,000 per year can afford to move into any apartment of more than four rooms which has been built in the City of New York since 1946 except for public or subsidized housing. This statement is well documented in the Tenant Relocation Report of the City Planning Commission, 1954, and in the City Club Report on Housing, 1954. The combination of the inability to use automobiles and the inability to obtain a decent house at a rental within the means of most tenants encourages moving out of the city.

Adequate new housing for lower-and-middle-income families in New York City is today only possible through subsidies, or through tax abatement, land cost writedowns, low interest rates and long term mortgages. (This is the finding of the Mayor's Committee for Better Housing, of which Mr. Henry Bruere was chairman. The Mayor's Committee also recognized the need to integrate the housing program with the general program for rebuilding the city. The Mayor's Committee report provides the necessary details about the kinds of housing that can be included in redevelopment programs.)

## 3. *The Shortage of Vacant Land.*

Most approaches to city planning in most communities deal with the extension of the city into vacant areas and the provision within those areas for zoning, transportation, schools, utilities, etc. No such relatively simple task faces the planners of New York. In fact, it is the misunderstanding of the role of planning in New York and its confusion with planning problems else-

where which, we believe, help to misdirect the present Planning Department and Commission. What is needed is not so much a department for planning as a department for replanning.

New York *must redevelop the central areas*, so as to alleviate the constriction which makes life in New York less attractive than it should be. It should be possible to conserve values built into present sewage, subway, public utility and other systems and not to abandon them while constructing new costly services to meet the needs of peripheral development. Since New York now has little area in vacant land except on Staten Island and in Queens, we are forced to face up to this question of rebuilding the built-up areas and acknowledge that this is the big task that lies ahead. (Conventional planning should, of course, be immediately undertaken to be ready for the assured growth of Staten Island when the new bridge is built.)

## 4. *Rapid Transportation.*

Only underground travel at high speed makes New York viable. Dependent on surface transportation, New York could hardly survive. Strangely, in the face of this well-known fact, the passenger volume on the City's subways has been falling. Coupled with this are the decline in traffic on some commuter railroads and the fact that some railroads cannot operate commuter services profitably with present traffic. This trend poses difficult questions as to the plans for the future construction and operation of transit facilities. These and similar matters are to be studied by the Metropolitan Rapid Transit Commission, for whose work New Jersey and New York have appropriated \$800,000. It may be that the moving of factories to peripheral areas has changed the pattern of employment and therefore of travel. Increased fares, too, have doubtless also affected travel patterns.

The City Club suggests that the answer to this problem will be found in redevelopment plans for central areas of the City which provide for the greater use of existing facilities. The City Club feels that the transportation problem should be attacked as part of a general

plan. Until there is agreement on a general plan based on redevelopment of central areas, the capital funds needed for additional transportation services should not be appropriated or expended.

### 5. *Schools.*

The matter of planning the construction and staffing of schools is one that requires most careful research. In general, the City Club Committee on Planning feels that this is a subject which should be, but is not, adequately analyzed by the Board of Education, which has funds for the purpose. Planning by the Board of Education involves not only the programming of school construction, but also such matters as the future need for bi-lingual teaching arising from population movements. At present, in the absence of a plan for the City's development and redevelopment, and with no adequate zoning controls, the Board of Education is forced, willy nilly, to make provision for large capital and operating expenditures over which it can have no real planning control. The best it can do is project probable demand. The school building program must be integrated into a redevelopment plan for the City. In this way, funds can be better allocated in relation to foreseeable need and investments fixed for significant periods of time.

### 6. *Traffic, Off-Street Loading and Parking.*

Even the best municipal plan of 35 years ago could not conceivably have taken into account the growth of automobile traffic, and especially the movement of goods by truck. Nor is it likely that we can now provide enough facilities to *eliminate* present congestion. While something can be done, for example, by taking through traffic off the streets and carrying it on specially built highways, this can be only a minor palliative. Any central, relatively traffic-free, area will serve as a sponge for more vehicles. The best that can be hoped for is to keep the problem under control and make gradual headway against it by traffic regulations and new, better planned street and highway construction.

The trucks, parked bumper to bumper, or bumper to loading platform, throughout all commercial, industrial and mixed neighborhoods of New York, and pulling away from curbs without regard for the flow of traffic, are not only transgressions on the general welfare but lead to costly delays. Not only must no plans for future construction of any type of building be approved without off-street loading facilities, but low-cost financing must be made available for the conversion of present buildings to permit off-street loading. And, because in certain areas no amount of off-street loading facilities would solve the problem, the City should have the right, within the discretion of the traffic commissioner, to permit night loading only.

Two major factors account for excessive parking of private automobiles on the City streets: the shortage of garages or parking lots and the high cost of garaging a car. The problem must be met in several ways:

- 1) More parking facilities must be provided, whether by private or municipal initiative.

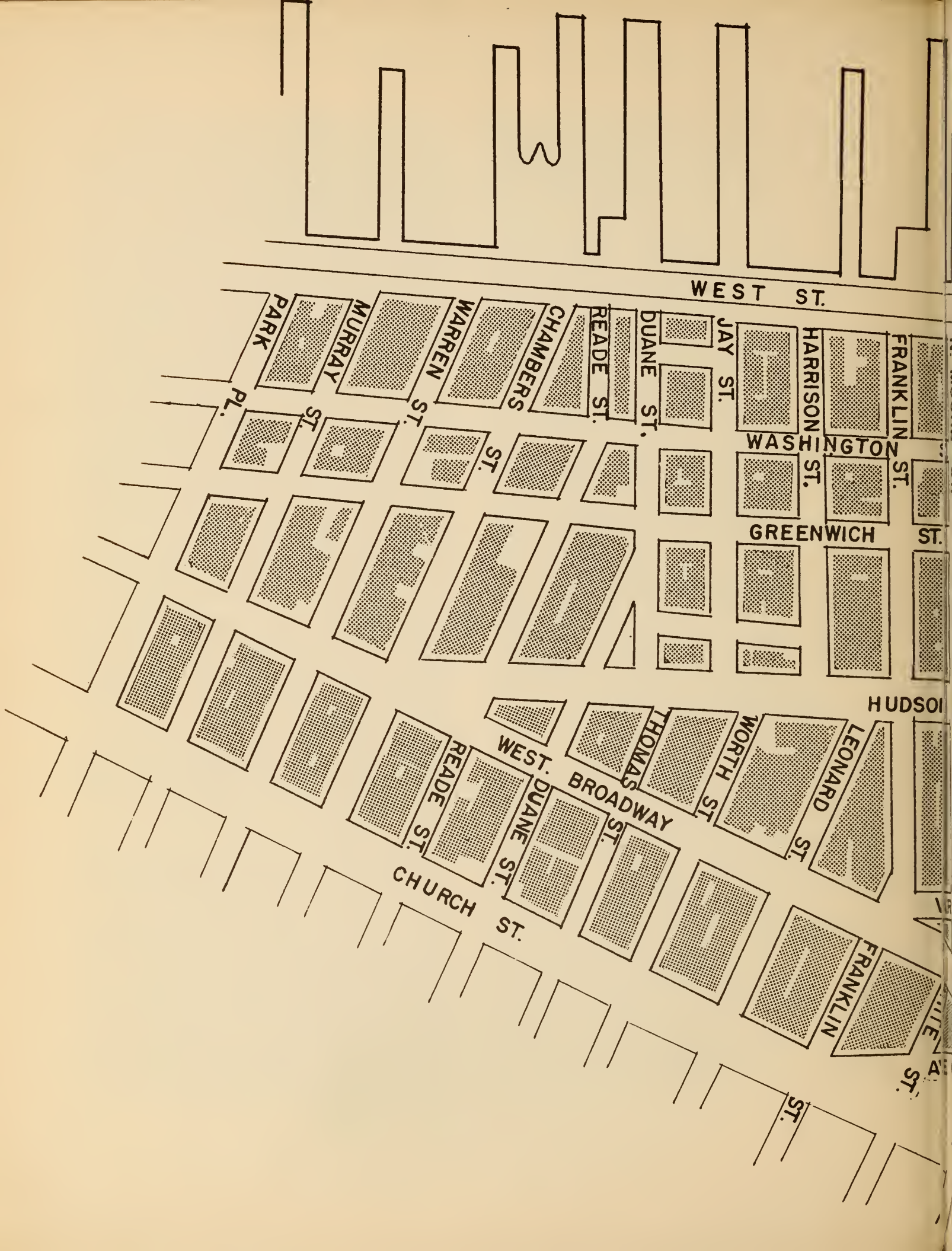
- 2) In addition to using the revenue from parking meters to provide parking garages, the City should not hesitate to use such revenue to subsidize off-street parking facilities. The objective should be to reduce the cost of off-street parking to the cost, or to near the cost, of metered parking.

- 3) In order to keep transient automobiles out of the congested areas, the program for providing parking facilities in peripheral areas should be accelerated.

### 7. *Recreation.*

For more than 20 years most of the recreational needs of the City have been under the control, both planning and supervision, of one man, who has both vision and the ability to get things done. Unfortunately, there is no clear picture of what future needs will be nor of what provision has been made for meeting these needs. In the absence of this kind of complete picture, the recreational program is in danger of either actually being, or being regarded as, simply a series of separate projects not clearly





WEST ST.

FRANKLIN ST.

HARRISON ST.

WASHINGTON ST.

GREENWICH ST.

HUDSON ST.

LEONARD ST.

WORTH ST.

THOMAS ST.

BROADWAY ST.

WEST DUANE ST.

CHURCH ST.

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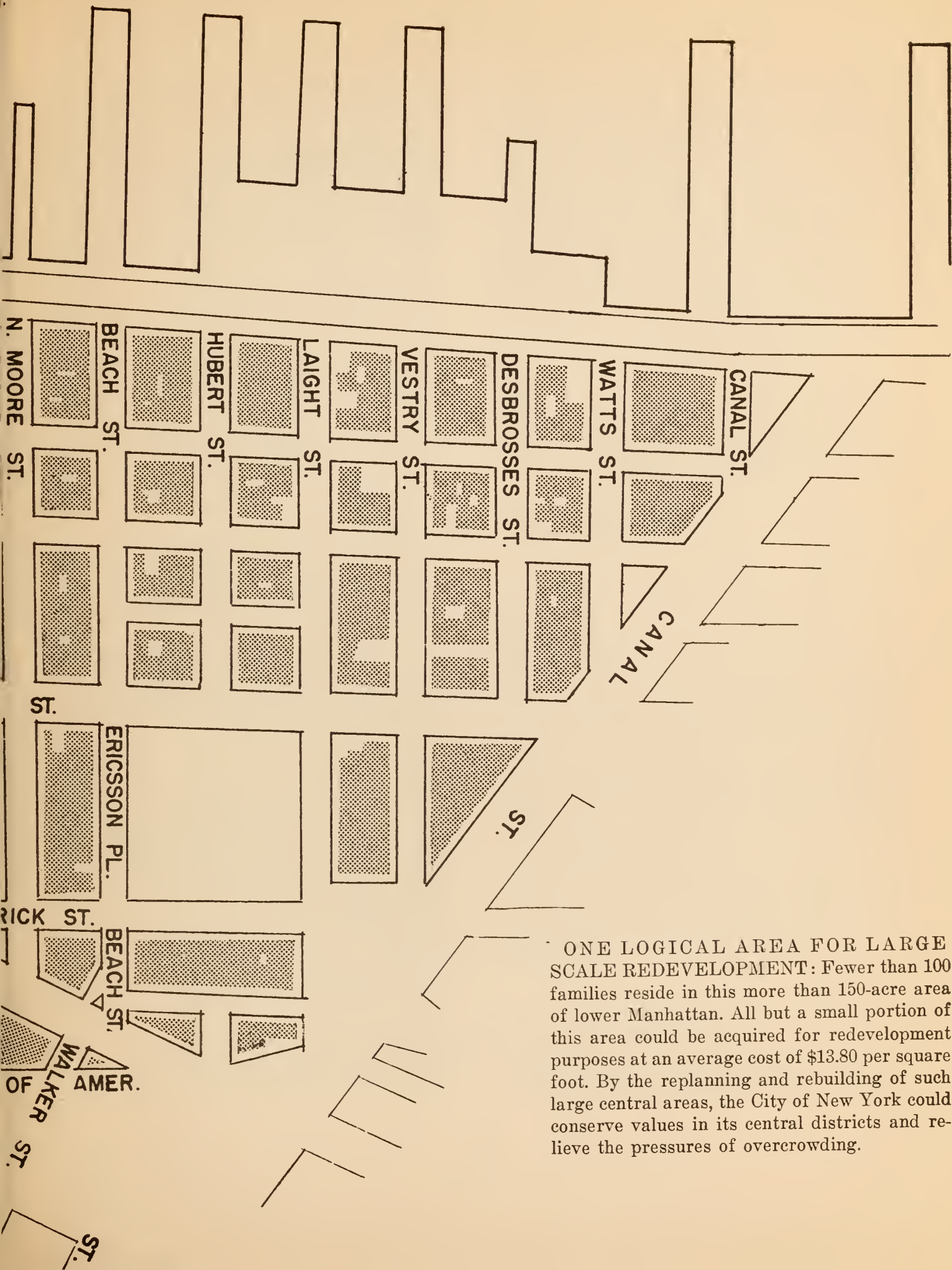
CHAMBERS ST.

WARREN ST.

MURRAY ST.

PARK PL.





ONE LOGICAL AREA FOR LARGE SCALE REDEVELOPMENT: Fewer than 100 families reside in this more than 150-acre area of lower Manhattan. All but a small portion of this area could be acquired for redevelopment purposes at an average cost of \$13.80 per square foot. By the replanning and rebuilding of such large central areas, the City of New York could conserve values in its central districts and relieve the pressures of overcrowding.

aimed at an overall goal.

The City Club was not able, in connection with its efforts to synthesize and redirect planning activities, to make detailed studies of the recreation problem. This highly specialized matter was studied by the Municipal Affairs Committee of the City Club last year, and it was recommended, in the light of the controversy then taking place over the St. John's recreational project in Brooklyn, that an independent, impartial group, such as the National Recreation Association, be engaged by the City Planning Commission or by some other appropriate branch of the City Government, to study the City's present and future recreational needs and set up objective standards by which the soundness of a recreational program can be judged. The Club reaffirms its earlier recommendation, but adds the request that such a study take into consideration what

new recreational facilities should be provided in the large areas to be redeveloped which are considered later in this report.

The Club also feels that it would be desirable if Commissioner Moses, as a part of his work, would publish a report indicating what he regards as the extent of the recreational needs of the City and what provision has been, or can be, made to meet these needs. The parts must be fit into a whole and the whole be judged adequate.

Provision for present and future recreation needs must be included in the master plan of the city. The master plan should provide for both local and citywide recreational facilities, including both provision for neighborhood recreation, such as playgrounds, small parks and open areas, and for the enlargement and improvement of beach properties and other major recreational facilities.

## THE LEGAL TOOLS FOR REDEVELOPMENT

### 1. *Zoning*

No planning can take place without some reasonable control over the development of private property. The concept of zoning for the orderly development of private property for its own protection as well as that of the entire City is well established in law and in practice. New York zoning has been criticized properly and endlessly by many authorities as being a hideous patchwork. New York needs the kind of overall zoning program which was contemplated in the Harrison, Ballard and Allen report prepared for the City Planning Department but never put into effect. The adoption of a new general zoning program has been held up by a combination which always triumphs over unaroused and unexpressed general public interest. This combination of narrow special interests and indulgent public officials has so far won in New York.

The failure to adopt a revision of our zoning ordinance can be attributed to the belief by politicians that it is better to play along with the *demands* of small but vigorous and vocal groups

than to support the *needs* of the entire population. However, much as a new, comprehensive zoning regulation is needed, it would be wrong to ascribe too much importance to mere zoning in planning and replanning the city. Zoning will not provide the new construction, the new public services, the new streets, open spaces, traffic and transportation facilities which would get at the root of the problem.

### 2. *Condemnation*

The major tool for replanning the City of New York is the power of condemnation. Up to now, condemnation has been used to clear land and, in a few cases, to acquire buildings, for public purposes only. But the City's power of condemnation should now be used to acquire land for redevelopment, whether for public or private use, on a scale not heretofore contemplated. This will be spelled out in some detail in the next section of this report. But the conclusion reached by the City Club Committee on Planning is that without condemnation on a vast scale, there is little or no possibility of replanning the City of New York.



## A GENERAL THEORY for REDEVELOPMENT

On the basis of the decisions which have been enumerated previously, a generalization can be made. This is that the planning program should begin with provision for the redevelopment of large central areas and provide within each such area as many as possible of the facilities necessary for satisfactory urban living and working.

Thus, a new redevelopment program for the central areas would select large, run-down or depreciated areas to be redeveloped for various kinds of housing so as to take care of the poor, the middle-income and the wealthy, for office buildings, shopping centers, amusement and recreation areas, schools, libraries and other educational facilities and for such industry as is appropriate to central districts of the City; also for parking and for off-street loading. The street plan would be completely redesigned to permit the free flow of traffic through the area and could tie in with an overall traffic plan for the Borough or City. Thus the area plans would be based on what is required to

create sound, small communities within a large community at the same time setting standards which would encourage owners of adjacent property to improve their holdings.

It is true that the City Planning Commission has designated certain sections of the city as redevelopment areas, but so far it has failed to suggest how these areas could be redeveloped along sound community lines, or how such redevelopment should be financed. Zoning, mere suggestions to investors, even control of the City's capital budget, are not enough. Furthermore, because of the activities of the Housing Authority, clearance is having the effect, through the construction of a single type of housing, of creating economic ghettos for the poor. When relatively small areas are redeveloped primarily through housing projects, even middle-income projects, we do not have balanced neighborhoods which provide for commerce and industry as well as housing and we complicate the parking and traffic problem.

## BOLD USE OF CONDEMNATION

In the opinion of the City Club, the key to successful replanning is the creative and bold use of the power of condemnation. The power to take land at fair value for public use is a part of our basic legal framework. We must take a new look at the power of condemnation and see whether or not in this tool we do not have the legal means to accomplish everything we must accomplish. Can the power of condemnation be extended in the scale and purpose of its use and be responsibly and intelligently administered? The City Club believes it can and must be.

On a smaller, but still significant, scale, the City of Pittsburgh, through its Redevelopment Authority working with the Equitable Life As-

surance Society, succeeded in replanning and rebuilding a large part of its downtown district. The Pennsylvania courts held that the methods used by the City of Pittsburgh under Pennsylvania State law were a proper and necessary use of the power of condemnation. The replanning of a section of Washington, D.C., sustained in the recent case of *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. p. 26, is another illustration.

The City Club believes that only through such large-scale condemnation will it be possible properly to replan areas large enough to have any significant effect on the total municipal environment.

## THE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY PLAN

The City Club recommends that the City of New York set up public authorities vested with

the power to acquire large areas of the City regardless of the present or ultimate use of each

plot within the area, except that such use should be for the purpose of urban renewal. Each area to be acquired would have a separate Authority.

After the acquisition of such areas, the buildings would continue to be occupied by their present tenants until such time as a new plan and new construction were agreed upon and demolition started. The Authorities so created would be empowered to sell bonds for the pur-

pose of financing their programs, thus placing the capital cost of replanning and redeveloping outside the City's debt structure. The revenue from the existing buildings acquired in condemnation would accrue to the Authorities and would be more than adequate to compensate the bond holders, pay the operating expenses of the planning group and finance planning research for the area.

### **AN AUTHORITY WOULD OPERATE AS FOLLOWS:**

1. The Mayor would appoint, after consultation with civic groups, bankers, etc., a balanced directorate representing the significant, responsible elements within the City to constitute an Authority authorized by state law, to be enacted, to undertake the replanning and rebuilding of an area. Such Authority would have the right to take title to property and issue tax-exempt bonds outside the debt limit.

2. The City, on behalf of the Authority, would condemn the area selected for administration by the Authority and convey this land to the Authority for the purpose of redevelopment. The price of the property conveyed would be written down to less than the City's acquisition cost as provided in the Urban Renewal provision of the U.S. Housing & Redevelopment Law. This reduction in the cost should be sufficient to provide the Authority with the necessary "cushion" for the Authority's bonds. Such bonds would then be backed by a first mortgage on the land, by the rental income from the old structures permitted to remain in the area, and by the land rent from long term leases for privately constructed new buildings. A sinking fund would provide for the repayment of the bonds, after which title to the land would revert to the City. Bonded indebtedness would also be retired, or the sinking fund increased, to the extent property is re-sold to other public agencies such as the Board of Education.

3. The Authority would be responsible for the area plan subject to the approval of the Planning Commission and Board of Estimate. It would have the funds to employ as consult-

ants leading architects, engineers and designers to prepare a functionally and esthetically sound plan for its area. With the help of such experts, the Authority would determine the best all-around use for the area, including the proportions of housing, office buildings, mercantile or service establishments and their location in relation to local and boroughwide transportation and traffic control, educational and other facilities. The plan would also take into consideration and make use of the financing available for subsidized public housing and slum clearance, middle-income cooperatives and limited dividend housing; also insurance-company, savings-bank and private funds for luxury housing, offices, parking facilities, etc.; also public funds available for schools and other public buildings, playgrounds and other recreational facilities, etc. A redevelopment plan would thus be a "package" providing not only a balanced community but also a balanced selection from all available sources of financing.

The planners would seek to conserve whatever genuine values exist in the area, developing their street and traffic plans in such a way as to protect and improve the value of sound structures at the same time as provision is made for the necessary overall improvement. The planners would also know which industries or services could make the greatest contribution to the city if properly relocated. As a part of the plan, land values as expressed in land rent could be rescaled in relation to desirability and the purpose for which the land is to be used and to reflect the value of public improvements cov-



ering the entire property such as underground trucking facilities.

Once a plan for an area is prepared, the Authority would be in a position to invite investors—governmental, institutional, corporate and individual—to participate in the reconstruction in accordance with the plans.

Through the means described above, we find that we have the method which has been sought all along for permitting people to own and park automobiles, for providing new housing, for avoiding outrageous congestion in certain business areas, for conserving the values already built into public services such as subways, sew-

ers, etc., and for fixing the investment in new facilities such as schools, libraries, playgrounds, for long periods.

At the present time there is no possible way of controlling environment and therefore no point in buying cheap land for a single structure. Zoning that will restrict the kind of structures which may be built is only a promise of what may happen 20 or 30 or more years hence. But building investments are usually contemplated on the basis of immediate and steady return. Buying and replanning of large areas solve a major problem for both builders and mortgagees.

### **A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE**

#### **Redevelopment of the Produce Market Area**

The above sounds like a very large order since *each* area program would involve hundreds of millions of dollars worth of construction. However, each and every detail of this general proposal can be worked out financially. By providing a concrete illustration of how it would work in one area, it can be shown how it would work in many areas.

For the purpose of this report, therefore, an area in Manhattan has been selected to illustrate how the recentralization concept would operate. This area is roughly bounded by Canal Street on the north, Church Street and Avenue of the Americas on the east, Park Place on the south and West Street on the west. (See map in center spread.) This is an area of approximately 150 acres, consisting for the most part of inefficient produce-market buildings and run-down lofts. There are a few good buildings, principally along Church Street, which would be conserved in any plan. On the whole it is a blighted area. There is no housing. Fewer than 75 families reside in the entire district.

From a planning point of view, this area would make an ideal place to start a redevelopment program. The fact that there is no housing in the area solves one of the major problems every re-builder must face—the hardship caused when people must be moved from sites selected

for public improvement. Every apartment house added in this area could be built without displacing anyone. The produce market is shockingly inefficient in its present location. Its operation there adds to the cost of every pound of produce that moves through it. The market should be relocated where it has direct access to railroad and waterborne transportation without transshipment and at a place where merchandise can be readily handled both on trucks and off. (This is an immediate, practical problem for the present Planning Department.)

This area is served by the West Side IRT and the Independent Subway at points where they are today least overburdened. It is near the Worth Street textile center which in recent years has suffered severely from emigration north and which could be saved.

If the City could replan and rebuild this area, it would recapture values far in excess of any investment, obtain new sources of tax revenue, and increase values in peripheral areas. What's more, this area represents an opportunity to prove that it is possible to create high real estate values in the very areas which are presumed to be most run down.

If only half of the proposed area were used for housing, with a permissible density within that area of 300 persons per acre, 22,500 persons

could be rehoused while fewer than 100 were being displaced. Yet, a density of 300 per acre is less than the density in most large-scale Manhattan housing projects, comparing with an estimated density of 397 persons per acre at Stuyvesant Town, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's large middle-income development. It is safe to estimate that there could be six

thousand or more apartments of from one to six rooms without excessive density.

The remaining acreage would be utilized for office buildings, loft buildings, parking, shopping, schools, recreational and amusement facilities and whatever else is needed. The planners could readily provide for the underground loading and unloading of trucks.

### **The Cost of Acquisition**

The assessed value of each of the lots and blocks comprising the 150 odd acres involved has been analyzed. The total assessment of the entire area, including land and improvements, is \$104,892,000. By eliminating the few modern structures in the area, such as the Western Union Building assessed at \$14,956,000, the area would have an assessed value for both land and improvements of not more than \$12 per square foot, an unusually low valuation. Experience indicates that the cost in condemnation would be 15% over assessed value, or \$13.80 per square foot.

Assuming a subsidy, under Title One for Urban Renewal, of \$6 per square foot, two thirds of which would be paid by the Federal Government and one third by the City, the Authority would have an acquisition cost of \$7.80 per square foot, low enough to provide an extremely attractive land cost base for a building program in Manhattan. The suggested \$6-per-square-foot subsidy compares with a subsidy of \$32.68 granted for the Coliseum and apartments at Columbus Circle, which make but a small con-

tribution to urban renewal.

For only \$12,000,000 of Title One funds from the City and \$24,000,000 of Title One funds from the Federal Government, a cushion would be provided for financing the renewal of a very large area of Manhattan, from which the City should obtain tax revenue far in excess of the present revenue. The new values would inevitably be many times the present assessments. Since the land would be rented, when the Authority bonds are retired, the City would receive rent as well as taxes, would have the benefit of the increment in the value of the land and would eventually own the buildings.

If there is to be any effective renewal of the central areas of New York, many such large projects are necessary. Such programs are economically feasible both in terms of the security of the investment in the acquired land, which is protected by existing income, and in terms of the conviction that only large-scale replanning and reconstruction can create economically sound neighborhoods.

### **The Timetable**

A reasonable timetable for the completion of this first project is four years, assuming the first year would be devoted to obtaining legal authority, financing and acquiring property. (The acquired property could be handled by a relatively small administrative staff by subcontracting real estate management work to existing professional management organizations.)

The second year would be devoted to the nego-

tiation and setting up of building projects with government agencies, financial institutions and private corporations, in accordance with a published plan for the area to be redeveloped.

The third year would see active construction well under way, with a part of the program completed.

It is, of course, not necessary to complete the entire program for one area before setting up another Authority and proceeding with rede-



velopment plans for another area.

It will be clear early in the work how the program is progressing. Other areas should then be

marked out and similar redevelopment work started.

## THE ADMINISTRATION OF PLANNING

It will be noted that it has been proposed to set up a series of Authorities, each to administer one program. This is because of the necessity of providing for financial responsibility and control. Each agency would be liquidated upon completion of its program and the retirement of its bonds.

It may be said that replanning the City is the responsibility of the City Planning Commission and the Department of City Planning. Yet, the history of the Commission and Department indicates that they have not possessed the creative vision necessary for the big job that must be done, nor are they equipped financially or personnel-wise for handling specific large-scale projects.

The Department of City Planning and the City Planning Commission were set up as independent bodies under the present Charter because of the feeling that planning should, if possible, be divorced from day-to-day administration and be handled by men with an independent outlook unaffected by political vagaries. It was also felt that planning had to be long-range and disinterested, that as a preliminary to action by the City Government, it should be based on independent authority, equal almost to the judicial.

These ideas were attractive in principle because the great need for planning the City's future was universally acknowledged. There was hope that through an independent body, the atmosphere of good government and interest in the City's welfare which existed in 1936 could be retained indefinitely. Unfortunately, the realities of practical politics have interfered with this idealistic concept. Mayors, even Mayor LaGuardia, hesitated to appropriate City money to be administered by persons over whom the political leadership had what it regarded as insufficient control.

Political realities having vitiated the dream of

a bold, vigorous, independent planning commission and department, it has become necessary to take a new road. All that the Department, understaffed and underfinanced and apparently lacking creative spark, can do today is undertake relatively small efforts at planning. What's more, under the Charter, the Commission must devote itself to petty duties, many of which could be handled readily by an engineering staff.

As matters now stand, the Planning Commission and its functions are almost hidden from public view. The people hardly understand that there is any agency responsible for dealing with the vexing problems related to their environment. The City Club feels that under a proper administrative set-up, the Mayor should be held directly responsible for planning. It would then be possible for public opinion to operate effectively in this area and mayors would realize that their administrations might stand or fall on the work they do in the important area of planning and redevelopment.

Accordingly, the City Club recommends the following:

1. That the City Planning Department as such be set up with a commissioner appointed by the Mayor, responsible to the Mayor and removable by the Mayor. This Department should be charged with making such studies as are necessary to provide for the future growth of the City, the welfare and convenience of the people, and with preparing a master plan, zoning regulations, the capital budget, etc. The Commissioner should be a member of the Mayor's cabinet and directly associated in his work with the office of the Mayor.

2. The Commission, as presently constituted, should be abolished. In its place, there should be set up, within the City Planning Department, a City Planning Board comprised of unsalaried civic-minded persons selected for their knowl-

edge of the City and devotion to its interests.

3. The Board should have the statutory power to promulgate plans and programs only with the approval of the Mayor and the Board of Estimate. Without the prior approval of the

Board, no plans should be approved or promulgated except by a three-fourths vote of the Board of Estimate. The Board should be appointed for periods overlapping any one administration.

### Summary

The City Club of New York believes that the City of New York has been deficient in seeking to create environmental conditions which would make the City a better place to live. This deficiency arises from: 1) a scale of thinking, planning and building which is pitifully small in relation to the size of the problem; 2) a lack of coordination in planning and building efforts which results in no clear picture of the total effect of the various private and public contributions to City development and which ignores one kind of problem—education or parking, as examples—while apparently offering solutions to other problems, such as more rapid movement of through traffic.

What is needed is a method for combining all necessary solutions to environmental problems within very large-scale, but relatively simple and administrable, projects. Such method is presented by the City Club in its proposal for redevelopment of many large central areas typified by the proposal for the redevelopment of the 150-acre area of downtown Manhattan now largely occupied by the produce market. Within such an area, each and every environmental problem, including housing, traffic and parking, schools, recreation and other community services, could be taken care of. And to provide for additional tax revenue to the city, such housing areas could be readily balanced with office and

loft buildings, truck terminals and other commercial facilities.

Because little vacant land remains in the City and because it is necessary to conserve existing values, the general planning concept of recentralization must be employed with respect to all master planning, including education and transportation programming. Much capital expenditure for new facilities can be avoided if the existing facilities can be revitalized. Although there should be no limit to the number of redevelopments such as the one proposed by the City Club as an example, the recentralization program need not be limited to areas which are to be completely rebuilt. It can also apply to neighborhood conservation, provided the program is big enough to make a significant contribution.

The City Club urges that the primary responsibility for planning and redevelopment to make New York a better place to live should be squarely placed upon the Mayor of the City through the reorganization of the Planning Department and its operation under his direct supervision. There is no need, however, to achieve the reorganization of the Planning Department and Commission before proceeding to obtain the necessary State legislation empowering the City to establish Redevelopment Authorities.